



# Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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## U.S.-Ethiopia Bilateral Meeting on Governance and Economic Issues

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Karl Wycoff, U.S. Agency for International Development Director for East Africa Robert Hellyer, and Financial Economist from State Department's Bureau of Economic, Energy, Business Affairs Jordan Winkler visited Ethiopia from March 2 through March 4 to participate in bilateral meetings between the govern-



*U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Mr. Karl Wycoff.*

ments of the U.S. and Ethiopia on governance and economic issues. In the bilateral discussions on March 3, DAS Wycoff, U.S. Mission Chargé d'Affaires John Yates, Director Hellyer and other American officials met with senior and working-level officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs,

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## U.S. State Department Issues Human Rights Report

The United States Department of State today released its annual Human Rights Report on Ethiopia. The report responds to the requirement by the United States Congress that the State Department report annually on human rights conditions in every country.

Trends, issues, and specific cases included in the report may originally stem from a variety of sources, but U.S.

Government officials in the United States and in Ethiopia make every effort to examine and clarify such reports before including them in the Human Rights Report. In investigating these reports, American officials consulted a wide variety of sources, including representatives of the Government of Ethiopia, civil society organizations, the political opposition, and human rights experts.

An English copy of the Report is currently available: <http://ethiopia.usembassy.gov/>. An Amharic translation of the Report will be posted on this website in early-April. ♦

**Please see last page for more information about the Human Rights Report.**

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## U.S.-Ethiopia Bilateral Meeting on Governance and Economic Issues . . .

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Finance and Economic Development, Trade and Industry, and Agriculture and Rural Development. These meetings, which were held as follow-up to bilateral meetings held in Washington DC on November 5, 2009, demonstrate a commitment by both governments to increase and broaden the U.S.-Ethiopian dialogue on democratic governance, economic development, food security, humanitarian assistance and security cooperation. In addition to his participation in the bilateral talks, Wycoff met with Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu and Prime Minister Meles, as well as representatives of the political opposition.

During the bilateral discussions, the U.S. representatives urged that measures be taken to ensure that the upcoming elections run freely and fairly. They stressed that there must be no violence associated with these elections as there was in 2005. The U.S. representatives underscored that free, fair, credible and peaceful Ethiopian elections in May depend on interparty dialogue, an effective and independent electoral complaints mechanism, credible administration of the conclusion of the candidate registration process, assiduous implementation of the code of conduct by political parties and Ethiopian Government institutions, a permissive operating environment for independent observers, non-partisan election reporting and equitable access to media. DAS Wycoff expressed the U.S. view that the government and ruling party must take their responsi-

bilities seriously by creating an environment in which all parties feel confident in fully expressing their opinions and implementing their electoral strategies. The U.S. delegation also emphasized the importance of the opposition conducting their political activities and campaigns in a responsible and positive manner. It is essential for both sides to avoid any violence in the run-up to the forthcoming election.

The U.S. welcomed the passing of the Code of Conduct implementing legislation and the release of nearly two hundred prisoners detained in connection with the 2005 elections and its aftermath, but noted credible reports of harassment and arrest of opposition supporters and candidates require strict and transparent implementation and enforcement of the Code. The U.S. delegation expressed deep concern about the human rights situation in Ethiopia, discussed the State Department's forthcoming annual human rights report, and agreed to ongoing consultations with the Government of Ethiopia on specific cases and trends.

On the topic of food assistance and development, DAA Hellyer emphasized the importance of global food security to President Obama's Administration. The U.S. believes that greater collaboration in developing a viable agricultural sector is the only way to help countries like Ethiopia feed themselves. He praised the Government of Ethiopia's commitment to implementing country-led plans to develop the agricultural productivity of Ethiopia

and pledged our assistance in this critical process.

The delegation stressed that current strong economic growth and ability to control inflation demonstrates Ethiopia's economic potential. The strength and expansion of Ethiopian Airlines was cited as an excellent example of Ethiopia's successful economic management and its development capacity. Ethiopia's success under the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) was another positive indicator mentioned. The U.S. representatives noted that government reluctance to liberalize Ethiopia's telecommunications, insurance and banking sectors prevents the Ethiopian economy from reaching its full potential and attracting broad investment. Jordan Winker outlined U.S. plans to improve the ways in which the U.S. and Ethiopia could cooperate on economic reform and trade issues.

The delegation from the Government of Ethiopia made a number of substantive and important points during the meetings. The U.S. delegation promised to take the suggestions back to Washington for further review and consideration. The vibrant discussion during the meeting significantly furthered the discourse between our two countries. Both delegations underscored their commitment to future talks recognizing that the bilateral dialogue between our governments is critical to maintaining our valuable partnership. ♦

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## United States Congratulates New African Union Chairperson

**Washington** — The United States on February 2 congratulated Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika, president of Malawi, on his election by the African Union General Assembly to serve as chairperson of the African Union (AU), saying it looks forward to continuing the U.S. partnership with the AU to promote peace, prosperity and security for all Africans.

In a statement, Phillip J. Crowley, assistant secretary of state for public affairs at the U.S. Department of State, said: “We share Chairperson Mutharika’s goals of ending child hunger and malnutrition and welcome his interest in promoting the critical goal of agricultural development and food security on the continent. The U.S. stands ready to partner with the AU on promoting democracy and good governance and to ensure free, fair and transparent elections on the continent in the coming year.”

Crowley said ( <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/February/20100203144438xjsnommis0.2905542.html> ) the United States also wel-



*Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika addresses the United Nations General Assembly at U.N. headquarters in New York in September 2009.*

comes Mutharika’s pledge to isolate those in Africa who seek power through unconstitutional means. “The United States will continue to work with the African Union to confront ongoing stability challenges in Guinea, Niger and Madagascar and to further peace and

reconciliation in Somalia, Darfur, Zimbabwe and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo,” he said.

He added: “We also hope to work closely with our African partners to confront the scourge of sexual and gender-based violence on the continent and ensure the full participation of Africa’s women in its socio-economic development.”

“We commend the AU for its efforts to work on these issues and pledge our continued assistance on these and other matters.”

*(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## Gabon's President Meets Clinton, Calls Corruption Africa's Cancer

By Jim Fisher-Thompson  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — Gabon's president, Ali Bongo, intends to use his country's two-year seat on the United Nations Security Council to highlight democratic reforms and his fight against corruption, which he terms a "cancer" sapping Africa's strength and potential.

"Unfortunately, when it comes to the African body, we have many diseases — and corruption is one of them," Bongo told America.gov in an interview after meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton March 8 at the State Department.

"Corruption is a major problem that has to be stopped," the African leader said, "which is why we are committed to fighting it. We know if we want to build a better future with responsible people, we especially need accountability, and this is what has been lacking."

Gabon, with a population of fewer than 2 million, is largely dependent on the energy and extractive (mining and timber) sectors and is the fifth-largest supplier of oil in sub-Saharan Africa to the United States. In 2009, the nongovernment group Transparency International rated the nation 106 out of 180 countries in its annual corruption index, tied with Argentina, The Gambia, Niger and Benin.

After his election as president in August 2009 and before traveling to the United States, Bongo instituted a number of government reforms, including cutting Cabinet posts while restructuring the

Treasury Department and launching an environmental effort called "Green Gabon."

At the same time, he streamlined government by eliminating several agencies and bureaucracies that were hindering innovation and investment in Gabon. He has also threatened criminal penalties for persons attempting to bribe public officials, according to a recent press report.



*Hillary Clinton (R) shakes hands with Gabon's president, Ali Bongo.*

Despite the challenges of corruption and reform, Bongo told America.gov: "I remain optimistic about Africa's future. We know we will make mistakes; we will struggle, and at times we will fall. But we will get up and move forward."

In international affairs, Bongo said U.S.-Gabon relations are "very good," adding, "We would like more progress on the economic front and are working on a trade agreement with the U.S. government."

Acknowledging Gabon's new responsibilities on the U.N. Security Council, Bongo said, "We are going to work very

closely with the United States and all the permanent members of the Security Council to make sure that the world is a better place." He had earlier addressed the Security Council, which Gabon chairs for the month of March.

Speaking to the press after her private meeting with the African leader, Secretary Clinton said, "I want to recognize President Bongo's efforts to improve government efficiency, eliminate waste and fight corruption.

"We know, as the president knows, that economic progress depends on responsible governance that rejects corruption, enforces the rule of law, provides good stewardship of natural resources and delivers results that help to change people's lives for the better.

"We stand ready to support Gabon as it further strengthens its democratic institutions and processes," Clinton said.

The secretary added, "We are very supportive of Gabon's efforts to diversify its economy, widen the circle of prosperity and create new opportunities for its people. Gabon is participating in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and taking other steps that will give confidence both to international investors but, more importantly, to the people of the country."

Speaking two days before the State Department issues its annual human rights report, Clinton said: "I also want to applaud the leadership that Gabon has shown in combating human trafficking. We have forged new partnerships with

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## Top U.S. Envoy for Africa Reviews Success Stories Across Region

By Charles W. Corey  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — Just back from a lengthy trip to sub-Saharan Africa, the top U.S. envoy for the region said he saw powerful success stories there.

In a February 28 interview with Reed Kramer, the chief executive officer and founder of AllAfrica Global Media, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson reviewed his trip to Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ethiopia and discussed U.S. policy priorities and developments across the continent.

"In Ghana, President John Atta Mills has demonstrated outstanding leadership in his first year and a half in office," Carson told Kramer. "He continues to put the interest of his country and his people before all else, and I think they're doing very well in Ghana."

Ghana is expected to be a major oil producer in the next two years, Carson said. "I think they have learned that oil can be both a blessing and a curse. They know there are two ways to go — to take the Norwegian model or to take the Nigerian model. Oil has been a tremendous asset in helping Norway and its citizens become more affluent, more educated and more economically resourceful.

"Nigerian oil has been a curse and has left the Niger Delta an environmental disaster, and it has left conflict in its wake," Carson said. "The Ghanaians realize this, and I think they will be good stewards of their oil and good stewards of their resources. I think they will use their resources on the basis of a strong democratic underpinning, and that's a

good thing. That's a good news story."

Another good news story is Benin, Carson told Kramer. "We sometimes overlook small countries that are doing re-

seen a reversal with Kérékou coming back. That's a compliment to the people of Benin."

Turning to Togo, which sits between two democratic states (Benin and Ghana), Carson said the United States hoped that country would also have good elections March 4. "Togo is at a crossroads, and if these ... presidential elections can be free and fair, Togo could begin its march towards a more representative democracy that spends a lot more time on building the country's economy and restoring critical infrastructure. I think that's a possibility."

Carson complimented democratic and development trends in South Africa, Botswana, Liberia, Zambia, Tanzania, Mali, Cape Verde and Mauritius as well. "There are a number of countries that should be applauded for their progress," he said.



*Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs  
Johnnie Carson.*

markably well. Benin, under its current democratic president, Yayi Boni, is using resources, as meager as they are, well and on behalf of the people. They've had an MCC [Millennium Challenge Corporation] compact — one of the early recipient countries — and they've used their MCC money extraordinarily well to work on agriculture, infrastructure and business projects. They're looking forward to successfully finishing their projects and making another request," he said.

"We forget that in the 1960s and 1970s there were more coups d'état in Benin than almost every other place in Africa, probably with the exception of Nigeria," Carson recalled. "But over the last two decades, we've seen successive democratic elections there. We've seen President [Mathieu] Kérékou win. We've seen President [Nicéphore] Soglo win. We've

Asked how the United States can encourage political and economic progress in Africa, the career diplomat said it can come about through political good will, positive encouragement, constant support for civil society and the principles of democracy, a constant dialogue with those who are part of the political elite, and support for civil society and an independent press. What is also needed, he said, is "a willingness to put our resources and money on the table to help reform — institutional reform that will strengthen democracy. We should come to the table with resources to help."

Carson quickly cautioned, however: "If we see people not doing the right things, people who are undermining the values of democracy, people who are corrupt, we should not only step back, but we

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## Top U.S. Envoy for Africa Reviews Success Stories Across Region . . .

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should criticize in a principled fashion. We should be engaged and we should encourage others to be engaged as well. That's absolutely critical."

On Nigeria, Carson said: "The Nigerian political elite made a strategic choice, and they made it in favor of democracy. They made it in favor of trying to work out a solution acceptable to the North and South, East and West, designed to create stability, constitutionalism and rule of law, including how a succession to the presidency is handled under an unexpected and adverse situation.

"We hope that this difficult period they're going through now not only will test their young democratic institutions but will strengthen them and harden them like a piece of steel as they go forward."

On the recent coup d'état in Niger, Carson said: "All coups are bad, whether they are the extra-legal sort that President [Mamadou] Tandja carried out in December or a military coup of the type carried out last week by military officers. They both are designed to promote the interests of small segments of the population for their own interests."

The United States was firmly against what President Tandja did in December by extending his term of office, Carson stressed. "If the individuals responsible for the intervention by the military really believe in democracy, they should set a swift timetable for an immediate return to democratic rule. And they should follow the AU [African Union] norms in that none of those involved in that coup d'état run for office. Those who tear down should not be allowed to benefit from the rebuilding."

On Guinea, Carson said he is optimistic. "A civilian-led transitional government is

in power. The military has moved off to the side. None of the individuals who were involved in the coup or in the violent events that occurred [during a pro-democracy demonstration] at the end of September in the stadium will be allowed to run for office, and there's still a commitment to hold elections within the six months agreed to by all the parties."

Everyone seems to be supportive of the Ouagadougou Accords that were worked out by President Blaise Compaoré, he said. It is also important that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the international community continue to play a monitoring role in that country, he added.

Carson said he would like to see a small ECOWAS civilian and military observer force on the ground there. "It would provide additional diplomatic eyes and ears for the ECOWAS community. It provides confidence and reassurance to the civilian population, who has been betrayed before. And it provides a watchdog to let the military know that their actions will be seen by the international community."

Asked about U.S. priorities in the Horn of Africa, Carson said the most important issue there is Sudan, where "we are looking for the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement [CPA] between the North and South."

Carson said the United States fully expects there to be a referendum in January 2011 that will allow the people of Southern Sudan the right to remain a part of Sudan or to vote for independence. "Making sure that the CPA is implemented, the referendum is held and that people are allowed to make a choice is a key priority in the area," he stressed.

Also on Sudan, Carson said seeing an end to the humanitarian and political crisis in Darfur is also urgently needed. He also

acknowledged "some significant and positive progress in the improvement in relations" between Chad and Sudan, and said the United States hopes that that will contribute to both stability and a return to a normal situation in Darfur.

A second major priority in the Horn Carson identified is Somalia. "We continue to support the Djibouti Process, the TFG [Transitional Federal Government], and Sheikh Sharif's government. We think it is important to marshal as much support as we can behind this process to help strengthen it, and to give Somalia an opportunity to come out from a political nightmare and a security nightmare that has gone on for two decades. We support the AMISOM [African Union Mission in Somalia] effort and we hope that more countries would support it," he added.

Third, Carson said the United States wants to see Kenya move forward, and he identified a fourth priority item: a more balanced, broad-based and comprehensive relationship with Ethiopia.

"Our relationship with Ethiopia on the security-sector front has been excellent. We want to ensure that we can have a dialogue with Ethiopia on critical issues concerning economic development, democracy and human rights. We want all of those areas to be as significant and as important and as good as that security relationship is. It's not a zero-sum game. The pie is large enough to grow, but we want to see things happen there that are much more positive, especially on the economic front."

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## U.N. Fails to Enforce Sudan Sanctions

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — There have been “major and frequent” violations of the U.N. Security Council arms embargo imposed against Sudan in 2005, and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice condemned the council’s inaction in the face of continued gender-based violence and military offensives. Rice called on the council to find a consensus to better enforce the sanctions to promote peace and stability in Sudan.

“We know that weapons continue to flow into Darfur, acts of sexual and gender-based violence continue unabated and with impunity, military overflights and offensive actions continue,” Rice told reporters at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York on March 4.

Despite the signing of a framework agreement and cease-fire between the Sudanese government and the rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), “we continue to receive reports of offensive military actions by the government of Sudan in Darfur,” Rice said.

Such behavior “does not suggest a new willingness on the part of Sudan to fully engage in the peace process,” Rice said,

adding that all of the Sudanese rebel groups must also “cease military activity and be part of the framework agreement if it is to be effective.”

The ambassador said that in the face of “blatant disregard” of Resolution 1591 (<http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2005/March/20050330130117EAifas0.719906>).



*U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice condemned the council's inaction in the face of continued gender-based violence and military offensives.*

html ), which imposed an arms embargo on the Darfur region beginning in 2005, the Security Council has failed to reach any consensus on how to improve enforcement, despite “very concrete” recommendations presented to it by the U.N.’s Sudan Panel of Experts in fall 2009.

“If ... greater will existed to implement existing measures, that would be, in itself, progress. And that is, in fact, what we are decrying here today,” Rice said.

“When the council imposes measures, whether on Iran, or North Korea, or Sudan ... those measures need to be fully and faithfully enforced. And in this instance, and frankly in contrast to some others, the level of commitment and energy behind enforcement is inadequate, and we’re working to change that,” she said.

The United States expects the Security Council’s committee that monitors the implementation of the resolution to “find points of consensus” to improve implementation and to “shine a spotlight on sanctions violations.”

“There are many steps that the committee could take, including looking at the role of the private sector,

including rigorous follow-up, to ensure that this [sanctions] regime has more credibility than it currently has,” she said.

The Obama administration will intensify its own efforts to provide information that may support implementation efforts. “We particularly are concerned about the importance of holding accountable violators who employ sexual violence against innocent civilians in Darfur,” Rice said.

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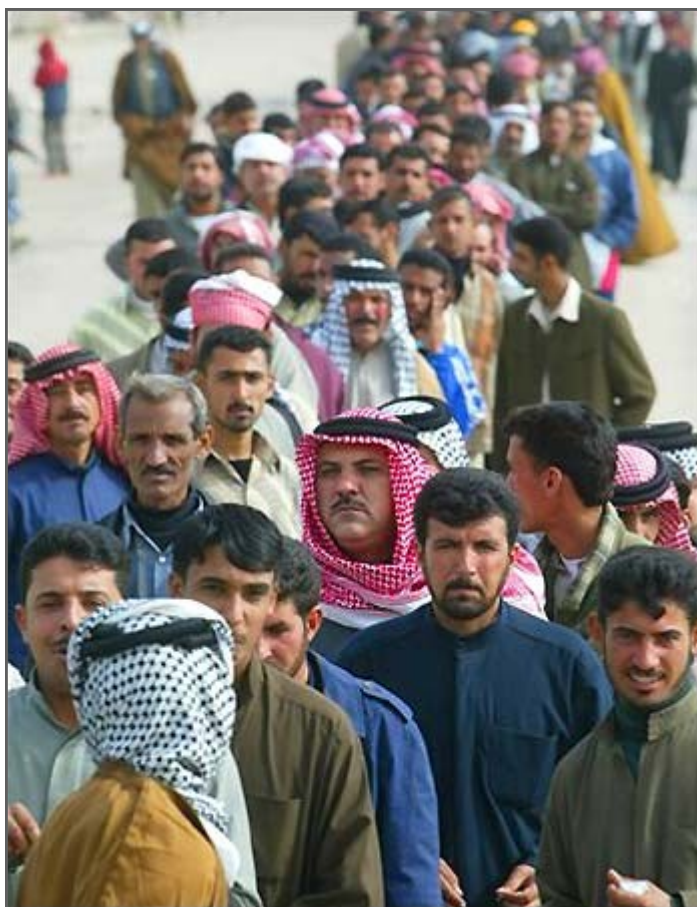
## Obama: Iraqi Election “Important Milestone”

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — Millions of Iraqis braved threats of violence to exercise their right to vote March 7, and President Obama praised their courage and commitment to the democratic process, describing the vote as an “important milestone in Iraqi history.”

Speaking to reporters at the White House March 7, the president pledged continued U.S. support to help the Iraqis “take control of their future,” while working to responsibly end the war and the U.S. troop presence in Iraq.

“I congratulate the Iraqi people on their courage throughout this historic election. Today, in the face of violence from those who would only destroy, Iraqis took a step forward in the hard work of building up their country,” Obama said.



*The fact that millions of Iraqis voted serves as a rebuke to the violence and threats of extremists, Secretary Clinton said.*

Press reports indicated that at least 35 people were killed by bomb attacks in Baghdad March 7, with additional attacks reported in Mosul, Falluja, Baquba and Samarra.

Obama said, “Al-Qaida in Iraq and other extremists tried to disrupt Iraq’s progress by murdering innocent Iraqis who were exercising their democratic rights,” but he added that the overall level of security and the prevention of attacks “speaks to the growing capability and professionalism of Iraqi Security Forces, which took the lead in providing protection at the polls.”

Along with Iraqis serving as poll station workers and observers at the nearly 50,000 voting booths and more than

8,000 polling stations across the country, Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission organized and administered the vote, and the president said the election “makes it clear that the future of Iraq belongs to the people of Iraq.”

Obama said the formation of a new Iraqi government is likely to take months following the vote count, adjudication of any alleged election frauds, and the building of a governing coalition.

“In this process, the United States does not support particular candidates or coalitions. We support the right of the Iraqi people to choose their own leaders,” he said.

He also warned of “very difficult days

ahead” with more violence, but said Iraq must be allowed to exercise its sovereignty and independence.

“No one should seek to influence, exploit or disrupt this period of transition. Now is the time for every neighbor and nation to respect Iraq’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the president said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton also congratulated the Iraqi people in a March 7 statement, praising their determination to reaffirm their commitment to democracy and a future without fear or intimidation.

“There is no better rebuke to the violent extremists who seek to derail Iraq’s progress,” Clinton said.

The U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Christopher Hill, told ABC television March 8 that Iraq had seen a good campaign

and a successful election. All of Iraq’s political parties participated in the process, he said, which was a contrast from the 2005 election, which the Sunni population largely boycotted.

The Iraqi public is “overwhelmingly supportive of this political process,” Hill said. He said he believes that, despite challenges and rivalries among the political parties, a government will be formed.

“There have been a lot of conversations among the coalitions already. And ... it will be a protracted period where there will be a lot of political horse trading,” he said.

General Ray Odierno, who commands

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## U.N. Fails to Enforce Sudan Sanctions . . .

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At the State Department, Special Envoy to Sudan Scott Gration welcomed the framework agreement and cease-fire signed between the Sudanese government and JEM, which he said “offers us an important opportunity to significantly reduce violence in Darfur,” but he also stressed the need to include the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), which represents most of the other rebel groups.

“The United States supports a peace process that is inclusive, that is comprehensive,” he said March 4. Along with the LJM, Darfuri civil society, internally displaced persons and refugees “must also have a voice in this process,” he said. That will be important “as we start talking about things like land reform and compensation and wealth sharing.”

The goal of making the peace process more inclusive is currently being ham-

pered by JEM’s insistence on exercising exclusive leadership over the other rebel groups, and the non-JEM rebels are having difficulties in choosing a leader and organizing themselves, he said.

Gration said the peace process and reduced violence would likely result in a decrease of people entering refugee camps, but “really won’t change the conditions that the people are currently living under.”

“We need a multipronged approach, one that brings a cease-fire, that brings stability and brings peace at that top level, but we also have to make the changes that will result in a more secure environment,” to benefit those living in camps and villages who still face banditry and lawlessness.

“Gender-based violence still continues. That must stop. People’s possessions are taken. They don’t have their rights, human rights, in many cases. This has to be

changed,” he said. The Obama administration is working with the international community to establish order and the rule of law in the region, as well as increase the capacities of U.N. and African Union peacekeeping forces.

With national elections scheduled for April, Gration said Sudan and the Darfur region have entered a “crucial time,” and the international community needs to take the opportunity to promote political transformation throughout the country to improve security and create a lasting peace.

“We will not rest until we’ve done everything we can to secure a brighter future for the next generation of Sudanese. Failure in this case is not an option, and we’ll strive for success,” he said.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## Obama: Iraqi Election “Important Milestone” . . .

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U.S. forces in Iraq, told the MSNBC network March 8 that American combat forces remain on schedule to leave the country by the end of August, and the additional 50,000 troops that are scheduled to stay until December 2011 will be there in support of Iraqi forces.

“We’re focused on helping them in their institutional piece of their army, developing long-term programs, developing long-term modernization programs, continuing to help them with their logistics, continuing to help them with the supporting military equipment, such as air sovereignty, being able to protect their oil fields out in the Arabian Gulf,” Odierno said.

Moreover, U.S. support for the Iraqi people and their institutions “will not end in December 2011,” he said. “There’ll have to be a continued commitment by the embassy and all our great civilians here, and the U.S. government, to continue to help Iraq move forward.”

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## Gabon’s President Meets Clinton, . . .

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the Justice Department, and Gabon is moving toward ratifying the U.N. protocol. This is one more example of the reform-minded leadership that President Bongo is bringing to his country.”

“We’ve come a long way,” Bongo responded. “We’ve gone through a democratic process, and now we are moving forward. Good governance, [the] fight against corruption, diversity [in] our economy and our partners. This is what we’re doing.”

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

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## Defense Secretary Gates Cites Progress in Afghanistan

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — Defense Secretary Robert Gates told reporters in Kabul that long-term success in Afghanistan ultimately will be determined by how well the Afghan government, with international support, can respond to the Afghan people and “inspire their loyalty.”

Gates, in Afghanistan to check on progress since operations were expanded late last year, met March 8 in the Afghan capital with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and Army General Stanley McChrystal, commander of U.S. forces and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). He also visited U.S. forces north of Kandahar March 9 to thank them for their efforts and sacrifice.

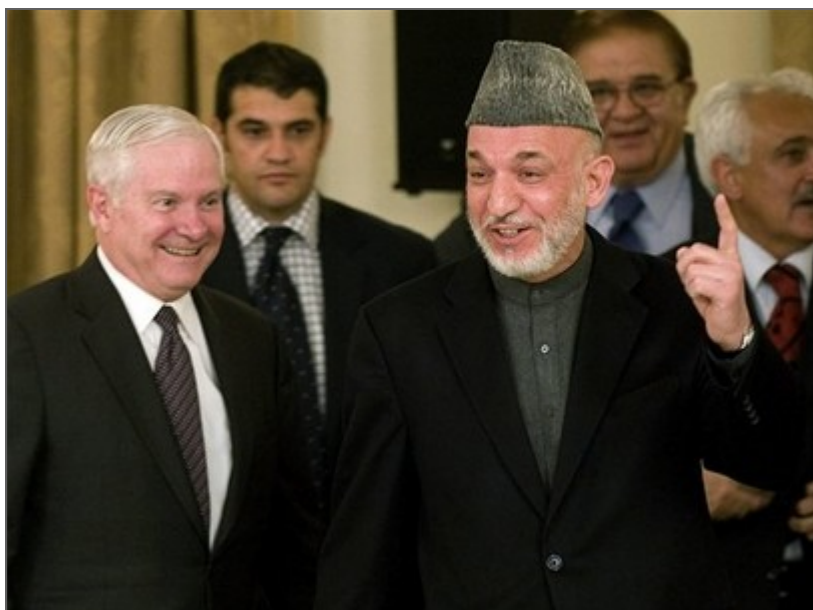
“The most pressing matter we’ve discussed was the major operation that President Karzai approved in Helmand province, where Afghan and international troops have succeeded in clearing almost all of Marjah and Nad Ali,” Gates told reporters at a joint press conference with Karzai. “Of course, the operation in Marjah is only one of many battles to come in a much longer campaign focused on protecting the people of Afghanistan.”

Gates added that since McChrystal made protecting the population the centerpiece of his military strategy, civilian casualties have been reduced.

As operations have expanded in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan, Gates said, Afghan national security

forces have taken on a greater role. Karzai has said his goal is to have 300,000 Afghan soldiers and police by the end of 2011. Gates said he will continue to work with NATO allies and other international partners to get more trainers and mentors to help achieve that goal.

“We’re all united in wanting to see the



*Defense Secretary Robert Gates, left, and Afghan President Karzai at a March 8 press conference in Kabul.*

Afghans assume greater responsibility for the security of their own country and their own people,” said Gates, who last visited Afghanistan in December 2009 at the outset of expanded operations.

Soon after President Obama put McChrystal in charge of forces in Afghanistan in 2009 and after McChrystal had completed an in-depth review of the security situation there, McChrystal advised the president that the situation would deteriorate without a substantial expansion of operations and forces. But Gates said after meetings with McChrystal that the general no longer sees the situation deteriorating and that there have been a number of positive developments.

In December 2009, the president ordered an additional 30,000 U.S. forces to be sent to Afghanistan, and the international community, including NATO allies, made pledges of additional military and civilian support, Gates said. So far, about 6,000 of that additional total have been sent to Afghanistan, with the remainder expected to arrive by the end of August.

“Improvements in the relations with Pakistan have yielded tangible results and increased cooperation along the border,” Gates told reporters. Afghan forces have also responded quite well to Karzai’s call to join the operations to secure the country from an insurgency being waged by remnants of the former Taliban regime.

Karzai told reporters that a peace jirga, a tribal assembly, will be

convened in about a month and a half and will solicit guidance from the Afghan people on how to move forward toward reintegration and reconciliation where it may be possible. Part of that reconciliation process is to convince some of the Taliban insurgents to lay down their arms and support the country, he said.

Karzai said that some of these insurgents were forced by circumstances or by other means to join the Taliban, but they are not members of that regime or the related al-Qaida terrorist network. And those insurgents who renounce violence and the Taliban and the al-Qaida network would be included in the reconciliation.

*(Continued on page 11)*

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## United States Helping Countries Counter Illegal Drugs

**By Kathryn McConnell**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** — The United States is committing resources to help other countries enforce anti-drug and money-laundering laws, said a top State Department official.

"Our cooperative efforts are essential," David Johnson said in a briefing ( <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/137531.htm> ) at the department. Johnson is the State Department's assistant secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

U.S. assistance ranges from training law enforcement officers to providing economic assistance to farmers to help them move away from poppy production.

The illegal drug trade threatens the security interests of the United States and the international community, according to the 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report released March 1. "No other criminal activity can match the profits generated from illegal narcotics trafficking," the report ( <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2010/> ) says.

The United States recognizes that it also needs to reduce its domestic demand for illegal drugs. "Without additional progress in reducing demand at home, our gains will be under severe pressure," the report states.

The report, which covers activities in 2009, says that during the past decade, virtually every country has recognized the serious threats posed by the drug trade, and such consensus is a great advantage to future drug-control efforts.

In the Western Hemisphere, Colombia's citizens and political leadership have resolved to re-establish the rule of law,

resulting in reductions in illegal drug production, according to the report. "The Colombian state is no longer in danger from insurgents fueled by the drug trade," the report says.

The United States and Mexico have agreed to cooperate more closely to strengthen institutions that prosecute those involved in the drug trade and other organized crime. Mexico also is developing the means to do background investigations of its entire police force. For the first time, trafficking groups are facing a threat from the state "which they cannot win by bribery or intimidations," according to the report.

As Mexico and Colombia continue to apply pressure on drug traffickers, countries in Central America and the Caribbean face problems from displaced traffickers who use land routes and coastal waters to move illegal drugs. To address the displacement, the United States is helping communicate police information to affected governments and is paying for police equipment, training and the development of new community programs.

The United Nations confirms that the drug trade is becoming more fragmented, the report says, with new markets and routes. Drugs are being trafficked by air from the Venezuela/Colombia border through West African countries to Europe, the region with the fastest growing cocaine markets, the report says. Despite limited capacity in many West African countries to investigate and prosecute drug traffickers, there have been some successes, notably in Sierra Leone.

The United States is prepared to deepen its work with Venezuela to help counter the increasing flow of illegal drugs through the country, according to the report. One problem, according to Johnson, is that while Venezuela has been

willing to cooperate to fight drug trafficking by sea, it has not been willing to cooperate in stopping trafficking by air.

On a positive note, Afghanistan's poppy production declined about 30 percent between 2007 and 2009, Johnson said. In 2009, the United States shifted its approach from focusing on eradicating poppies to a more cost-effective approach of developing alternative ways for farmers to earn a living. In Helmand province, Afghans have both expanded police enforcement and offered alternatives to drug production, he said.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

### Defense Secretary Gates Cites Progress . . .

*(Continued from page 10)*

"There are, we believe, thousands of those fighting for the Taliban who do so out of economic necessity or because they or their families have been intimidated," Gates said at the press conference with Karzai. "It's important to create the conditions for them to rejoin Afghan society and rejoin the Afghan political system."

But Gates also said it is important that reconciliation be done at a time when it conforms to the terms of the Afghan government, when those who are reconciled agree to or abide by the Afghan constitution, disarm and dissociate with the Taliban and al-Qaida.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*



## Indonesia Left Its Mark on Obama

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — When then-Senator Barack Obama wrote *The Audacity of Hope*, published in 2006, he reflected on the four years he lived in Indonesia as “a joyous time, full of adventure and mystery,” and said he wanted to bring his wife and daughters “to share that piece of my life.” Many years later, Obama is making his first visit to the country as the U.S. president, writing a new chapter in his personal relationship with the country.

When White House press secretary Robert Gibbs announced the visit February 1, he said Obama would be coming to formally launch the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership initiative. But White House reporters immediately asked if the president would also be coming to follow up on his November 2009 statement that he wants to show his family some of his “old haunting grounds.”

“I’d anticipate that that will likely be one of the stops,” Gibbs replied.



*The future president, right, lived in a modest Jakarta neighborhood with his mother, stepfather and sister in 1967-1971.*

In 1967, 6-year-old Barack and his mother, Ann Dunham, left their home in Hawaii for Jakarta. They came to join his new stepfather, Lolo Soetoro, who had been forced to abandon his studies at the University of Hawaii when he was conscripted into the Indonesian army. The future president was soon enrolled

in a local public school, and was known to friends as “Barry Soetoro.” Taller, foreign, and of a different ethnicity than his classmates, Barry stood out, but he soon made friends and his mother encouraged him to learn Indonesian and rapidly acculturate to his new surroundings.

“We lived in a modest house on the outskirts of town, without air-conditioning, refrigeration or flush toilets,” Obama wrote in *Audacity*. His best friends were “the children of farmers, servants, tailors and clerks,” and his years in Jakarta were “days of chasing down chickens and running from water buffalo, nights of shadow puppets and ghost stories and street vendors bringing delectable sweets to our door.”

He joined an Indonesian Boy Scout troop and played soccer, which would not become popular in the United States until years later. The future president also displayed a naughty schoolboy side, getting in trouble for crashing through a bamboo fence at school.

But young Obama’s life in Jakarta also exposed him to poverty, suffering and natural disaster — factors with which many Americans were unacquainted. “The world was violent, I was learning, unpredictable and often cruel,” Obama later wrote in his 1995 book *Dreams From My Father*.

*(Continued on page 19)*



*Known to friends and classmates as “Barry Soetoro,” Obama, circled, said he gained special insights from living in a new culture.*

## Russian Version of Sesame Street Promotes Creativity, Tolerance

By Carrie Lowenthal Massey  
Special Correspondent

**Washington** — Businka, a 3-year-old Muppet on *Ulitsa Sezam*, the Russian production of the U.S. children's show *Sesame Street*, encourages her viewers to shed their inhibitions and let their creativity flow through art.

Businka's audience, preschool-age Russian children, send her paintings and drawings, which she displays on the show while she sings songs about her own love for art.

"Through Businka, we were trying to say, 'All types of art are valid; make your big Van Gogh flower, make a house that's kind of abstract,'" *Sesame Workshop* producer Basia Nikonorow said in a press release. *Sesame Workshop* is the New York City-based nonprofit organization that supports *Sesame Street* programming and conducts additional educational outreach in more than 140 countries throughout the world.

Fostering creativity and artistic expression reflects one of *Ulitsa Sezam*'s educational missions. The arts play an integral role in Russian culture, and parents expose their children to art from a young age, according to *Sesame Workshop*. Businka and her friends try to teach children to let go of a sense of rules and boundaries when it comes to art and to think freely as they design their own pieces.

Throughout its 14-year run on Russian television, *Ulitsa Sezam* has focused on educating its young audiences about timely issues. This production model mir-

rors that of the original *Sesame Street*, which first aired on American public

with the foods associated with the many nationalities living in Russia and tolerance for people with disabilities.



*Characters on the U.S. version of Sesame Street have entertained and educated children for decades.*

broadcasting on November 10, 1969. Now the longest-running children's television program, *Sesame Street* and its 25 international partner productions have taught children to think in new ways.

In 1996, *Ulitsa Sezam* began broadcasting with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Open Society Institute (a New York-based foundation), and Nestlé Russia. The show's initial curriculum centered on themes of change to help children adapt to the changes Russia faced as it continued its transition to democracy from the Soviet era. Topics included voting, acceptance of differences among people from various ethnic groups, familiarization

"We worked on breaking down some stereotypes," said Robin Hessman, an American documentary filmmaker who studied film in Russia and worked as a producer on *Ulitsa Sezam* from 1995 through 1999. "We also showed different ways to solve problems, and the importance of try, try again."

As far as Hessman could tell, the first episodes of the program reached an eager audience.

"There was no other educational, entertaining show for Russian preschoolers in the 1990s. It was very exciting. I actually remember when it finally aired I was packing to go home for Christmas and looking out the window. ... I looked across the u-shaped building I lived in and could see that all the TVs I saw — there were about seven — were all watching. I could tell from the way the colors were changing," she said. After a year and a half of preparation, Hess-

man explained, actually seeing the production on the air was somewhat surreal.

Even if its debut felt otherworldly to Hessman, *Ulitsa Sezam* built on its foundation of helping children adapt to real-life situations. In 2006, the show tackled the sensitive issue of adoption, introducing a young boy named Kolya who was adopted by Aunt Dinara and her husband, Uncle Jura. A film about a girl who lives in an orphanage sought to educate young children about adoption and increase a positive reception for orphans and the adoption process.

Live-action films incorporated into *Ulitsa*  
(Continued on page 19)



## President Obama Signs Travel Promotion Act

**Washington** — A bill signed into law by President Obama March 4 is aimed at encouraging more international visitors to come to the United States.

The Travel Promotion Act of 2009 (TPA) creates a new public-private partnership between the U.S. government and the nation's travel and tourism industry. The new law calls for creation of the Corporation for Travel Promotion, which will oversee the development and implementation of a global marketing and promotion campaign aimed at increasing the number of international visitors to the United States. The corporation will be funded through fees collected from international travelers from Visa Waiver Program ([http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without\\_1990.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html)) countries and matching contributions from the private sector, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Unlike many other nations, the United States never has had a national travel promotion board, although a number of individual states, such as California and Florida, have established such entities to encourage visits by international travelers.

The new federal law aims to reverse the United States' downward-trending share of the global travel market. In 2009, the United States welcomed 2.4 million fewer overseas visitors than in 2000, a decline that has cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$509 billion in total spending and \$32 billion in direct tax receipts, according to the U.S. Travel Association

(USTA), a trade group that lobbied for passage of the legislation.

The Commerce Department said it "stands ready to work with the private sector to promote international travel to the United States" and added that the travel and tourism sector is the United States' top services export, valued at

company, estimates the travel promotion program under the Travel Promotion Act will generate \$4 billion in new visitor spending and 40,000 new jobs annually. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the program will reduce the federal budget deficit by \$425 million over the next 10 years.



*Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, is a popular U.S. destination for international visitors.*

\$142 billion and supporting more than 1 million American jobs.

"When international visitors come to the United States they spend money on a wide range of goods and services that support U.S. jobs," said Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke. "Creating a global tourism promotion program to encourage international visitors to vacation in America will help spur economic growth and create more jobs."

Overseas visitors spend an average of \$4,500 per person, per trip in the United States. Oxford Economics, a consulting

The law directs Secretary Locke to appoint an 11-person board of directors that will be charged with establishing the nonprofit corporation. Board members will be chosen from the private sector and are expected to represent all segments of the travel industry, according to USTA.

The U.S. travel industry is enthusiastic about the new law.

"By signing the Travel Promotion Act, President Obama has acted to support the power of travel to serve as an economic stimulant, job generator and diplomatic tool," said USTA President Roger Dow.

"Today, America extends a heartfelt 'Welcome' to the rest of the world," said James Rasulo, senior executive vice president and chief financial officer of The Walt Disney Company and past national chairman of the U.S. Travel Association. "It is a great example of the innovative solutions government and industry can create when they work together toward a common goal."

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## Iraqis in America Proud to Vote

By M. Scott Bortot  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — Iraqis living in the United States are heading to election centers nationwide March 5–7 to vote for the 325 members of Iraq’s Council of Representatives. For Iraqis living in America, this vote is meaningful because it is the first time out-of-country Iraqis will be able to vote for the Council of Representatives.

At a press conference March 5 marking the vote at a polling station in Arlington, Virginia, Senator Richard G. Lugar, the ranking Republican on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, praised Iraqi-American election cooperation.

“I’m certain that all of my colleagues in the Senate and all Americans pray for the success of the elections in America and in Iraq,” Lugar said.

Joining Lugar at the press conference, Iraq’s ambassador to the United States, Samir Sumaida’ie, thanked the American people for the sacrifices they have made in securing Iraq’s future.

“Today marks a transition into a new era of more stability and more progress for Iraq,” Sumaida’ie said of the elections. “We want all people to see that the elections are conducted openly, transparently and freely.”

The estimated 200,000 eligible Iraqi voters living in the United States are joining some 2 million Iraqis in 16 countries outside Iraq for the three-day vote. At nine

polling stations across the United States, Iraqis can vote by showing proof of Iraqi citizenship, age and a connection to one of the country’s 18 governorates. Iraq is holding ( <http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2010/March/20100305155712esnamfuak0.145>

tions inside Iraq. According to IHEC legal adviser Majdi Khouri, IHEC employees from Iraq flew to the United States at the end of January to lay the groundwork for the polling centers.

Around 350 people nationwide worked on election preparations. Election organizers held meetings in Iraqi-American communities and utilized the Internet and newspapers to promote the vote.

Khouri thanked American officials for helping with IHEC’s election preparation efforts.

“The cooperation has been great in terms of security and organization,” Khouri said. “They have also been helpful in providing materials and helping

us overcome any obstacles.”

Iraqi-born Abdul-Sattar Al-Obaidi, who also voted in Arlington, said there are two kinds of Iraqis voting in this election in America: those who hold dual U.S.-Iraqi citizenship are voting for the people they still care about in Iraq, whereas recently arrived Iraqis to the United States are voting as if they are still in Iraq.

Despite the differences in perspective, both types of Iraqis voting in America share a common bond, said Al-Obaidi. “We hope these elections lead to stability by selecting new people better able to run the country in accordance with the law.” ♦



*Iraqis show off their ink-covered fingers after voting in Arlington, Virginia.*

7331.html ) its elections on March 7, and 18 million eligible voters can make their voice heard.

At the Arlington, Virginia, polling center Iraqis were enthusiastic about casting their votes in America. Iraqi-American Dana Aziz said the voting in America means a lot to him.

“I’m very proud of this day in which we have the right to vote as Iraqis in the United States,” Aziz said. “It is a chance for the Iraqi people to express themselves through this election.”

Arranging the out-of-country voting in the United States was the task of Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), which also is responsible for elec-

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## As Election Begins, “Iraq Is Ready,” United States Says

**By Stephen Kaufman**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** — Voting in Iraq is under way for voters such as hospital patients, prisoners and security personnel who will be on duty for the main March 7 election. The State Department says so far the process is going well, despite a handful of security incidents that affected three voting centers.

“Iraq is ready, and we think they’ll be able to protect their citizens as they go to the polls on Sunday,” Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley said March 5. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad has reported that Iraq’s security forces and election officials seem well prepared “and the voters enthusiastic,” Crowley added.

The security incidents that have occurred have “failed to deter the determination” of those Iraqis who were eligible to vote early, he said.

Iraqis are voting for a four-year parliament in the country’s second national election since the Baathist regime led by Saddam Hussein was toppled by U.S. and international forces in 2003.

In the run-up to the election, “every community seems to have been fully ... participating in the campaign,” Crowley said. “We think that is very encouraging.”

The U.S. Senate unanimously passed a bipartisan resolution March 4 recognizing the significance of the election and reconfirming the U.S. commitment to

building “a robust, long-term partnership with Iraq that strengthens Iraq’s security, stability, economy and democracy.” The resolution also commends the Iraqi people for “the courage they have shown; the sacrifices they have endured; and the hard-won gains they have made in fighting terrorism, finding peace, and building democracy.”

With all U.S. combat troops on schedule to withdraw from Iraq by the end of August, Senate Foreign Relations Commit-



*Most of those voting early have been security personnel, who will be on duty protecting voters and polling places on March 7.*

tee Chairman John Kerry (Democrat from Massachusetts) said Iraq is entering “a new phase” in its political life.

“America’s involvement in Iraq will change, but our commitment to the people of Iraq will not end. We are sending a strong bipartisan message that America remains deeply invested in Iraq’s stability, democracy and well-being,” Kerry said. General David Petraeus, the commander of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), told PBS Television’s Charlie Rose March 3 that if all goes well, the election will result in a government that represents and is responsive to all of Iraq’s sectarian and ethnic communities.

“You’ll have as a result ... the new parliament, the new council of representatives. And then you’ll have the next election, in a sense. And that will be the cobbling together of a coalition that will have to be made up of not just Shia, the majority sect, but also Sunni; and not just Arab but also Kurd,” Petraeus said.

The communities have learned the lesson of how sectarian violence “tore the fabric of society” in 2006 and 2007 and know they will need to cooperate on a political level to form the next government.

“There’s no way you can get the number of votes required to select that next prime minister, president, speaker of the council of representatives, and probably a package deal that includes some key ministers, without getting a cross-ethnic, cross-sectarian coalition of votes,” he said.

The new government will be tasked with tackling lingering issues such as how power and oil revenues are to be shared between the communities, but Petraeus praised Iraq’s potential for success.

The Iraqi population is “well-educated, is entrepreneurial, will go out and they’re go-getters. So the potential is enormous. But it’s enormous only if the people continue to work together. As we used to say, it’s okay to shout, just don’t shoot,” he said.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## In the Middle East, Modest Progress Made on Women's Rights

By Jeff Baron  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — A new report on women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa finds some progress but "a long road ahead."

Of all parts of the world, it is this region in which "the gap between the rights of men and those of women has been the most visible and severe," says the report by Freedom House (<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=444>), an independent, nonprofit organization that studies and advocates for human rights worldwide.

This is Freedom House's second effort to analyze the restrictions on women, country by country, in 17 Arab nations and territories; this report also includes Iran. The study found improvement, overall, in 15 of the countries since the release of the first report in 2005, with the most progress coming in Kuwait, Algeria and Jordan. Three places that have faced violent internal conflicts and a rise in religious extremism — Iraq, Yemen and the Palestinian Territories — lost ground in women's freedoms.

The report "charts progress as well as remaining challenges, giving countries a compass for the way forward," said Dalia Mogahed, a Freedom House trustee and executive director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies.

Ronald Schlicher, the U.S. principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, said he was struck by "a substantial deficit in human rights" documented in most of the region, but he



*"In several areas, women's rights have actually improved, and nowhere is this more evident than in education," says Sanja Kelly.*

welcomed progress in the economic, educational and political lives of women, "and for the broader society as well." The State Department provided some of the funding for the Freedom House project.

Schlicher said the greatest gains came in the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which had scored the lowest in the report five years ago. In 2005, Kuwait gave women the same political rights as men, and four years later, Kuwaitis elected women to parliament for the first time. Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates appointed women to judgeships for the first time. And women in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar gained the right to travel without the permission of a guardian.

The study evaluated each country on the extent to which women who live there enjoy the principles included in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On a scale of 1 to 5 — with 5 meaning that the government and others almost never prevent women from exercising their rights and that women almost never face gender-based discrimination — no country scored higher than 3.6 in any of the five categories on which they were rated:

- Nondiscrimination and access to justice.
- Autonomy, security and freedom of the person.
- Equal rights and equal opportunity.
- Political rights and civic voice.
- Social and cultural rights.

Ten of the 18 countries and territories failed to score as high as 3 in any of the five categories. A score of 3 means that women sometimes are not free to exercise their human rights, that they have "adequate human rights protections but they are poorly implemented," and that they "occasionally face gender-based discrimination."

One country, Saudi Arabia, scored below 2 in every category. A score of 2 means that women's rights are mostly restricted, that women "have very few adequate human rights protections and they often face gender-based discrimination."

Sanja Kelly, who directed the Freedom House project, said the trend is in the right direction for the region's women. "In several areas, women's rights have actually improved, and nowhere is this more evident than in education," she said. Female literacy rates are up, and in many countries women far outnumber men on college campuses.

*(Continued on page 18)*



## In the Middle East, Modest Progress Made on Women's Rights . . .

(Continued from page 17)

They also have made economic gains. "Women are more represented in the work force than ever before," Kelly said.

Still, "the main message here is that women in the Middle East are being discriminated against in all aspects of their lives," she said.

Among the issues that Kelly said are common in most countries of the region are laws that set the status of women below that of men in court and on family matters; laws that prevent women, but not men, from conveying citizenship to their spouses and children; the acceptance of harassment and violence against women; and laws that promise equality but that are ignored.

Rana Hussein, a journalist and author of the report's section on Jordan, said her country had made important improvements in the lives of women. One problem she has covered is "honor killings," in which a man will kill a woman in his family over a matter of honor. Such killings are tolerated in much of the Middle East, but Jordan has set up a special tribunal to deal with them and handed down stiff prison terms. "We need to eliminate and erase any law that excuses the murder of women," Hussein said.

Huda Ahmed, who wrote the Iraq report, said women there have far more rights on paper than in the reality of a nation still subject to violent unrest. "The problem is, for every step forward, we take 10 steps backward, and always related to violence," she said.

Those involved in the study said women in many countries face a large gap between what the law says and what some in society permit. "We have very strict

One area that Ziada said offers promise for women is the spread of the Internet. Online, she said, women and men are equal because they cannot be distinguished from one another, and women can use that experience to look for equality in the rest of their lives.

"We all know that once we empower women, we empower all of society," she said.



*"The solution is not about working on laws. The solution is about working on the mentality," says women's rights activist Dalia Ziada.*

laws against sexual harassment, but women are being harassed in the streets, in the workplace, even in their homes," said Dalia Ziada, an Egyptian activist and head of the North Africa Bureau of the American Islamic Congress ( <http://www.aicongress.org/> ).

Ziada said that Egyptian women can vote and hold office but that they "are usually used as decoration" by political parties.

"The solution is not about working on laws. The solution is about working on the mentality," she added.

The report is available in English at the Freedom House Web site, including a chart and graphs ( [http://freedomhouse.org/uploads/special\\_report/section/269.pdf](http://freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/section/269.pdf) ) (PDF, 68KB) showing and comparing the countries' scores in each category of women's rights. The group is posting Arabic translations ( [http://](http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=271&parent=23&report=86)

[freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=271&parent=23&report=86](http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=271&parent=23&report=86) ) of the report and the country-by-country sections. The Freedom House program that focuses on rights in Iran, Gozaar ( <http://www.gozaar.org/> ), has posted a Persian translation ( <http://www.gozaar.org/template1.php?id=1343&language=persian> ) of the report on women's rights in Iran.

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Telling America's story

## **Indonesia Left Its Mark on Obama . . .**

*(Continued from page 12)*

Compared with many of his Indonesian neighbors, Barry was relatively well-off. His stepfather surveyed roads and tunnels for the army, and later got a job with Mobil Oil. His sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng, was born in Jakarta. His mother earned additional income for the family by teaching English to Indonesian businessmen at the U.S. Embassy.

Obama said his mother's ties to Indonesia never diminished, despite her decision to separate from Soetoro and move back to the United States in 1972. "For the next 20 years she would travel back and forth, working for international agencies for six or twelve months at a time as a specialist in women's development issues, designing programs to help village women start their own businesses or bring their produce to market," he wrote in *Audacity*.

With the help of his sister, Maya, their mother's doctoral dissertation, *Surviving Against the Odds: Village Industry in Indo-*

*nesia*, was revised and published as a book by Duke University Press in 2009.

In *Dreams*, Obama wrote that his upbringing and exposure to a new culture "made me relatively self-sufficient, undemanding on a tight budget, and extremely well mannered when compared to other American children."

But his mother ultimately decided to send him back to Hawaii to continue his schooling. "She now had learned ... the chasm that separated the life chances of an American from those of an Indonesian. She knew which side of the divide she wanted her child to be on. I was an American, she decided, and my true life lay elsewhere," he wrote in *Dreams*.

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## **Russian Version of Sesame Street Promotes Creativity, Tolerance . . .**

*(Continued from page 13)*

Sezam episodes have helped to take young audiences to the different regions of Russia as well as to neighboring countries, including Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan. The films let children see people "in their native environments," producer Nikonorow said in a press release. One film shows a young Siberian boy whose grandfather teaches him to lasso a reindeer's antlers.

The films contribute to the show's celebration of Russian creativity and art.

"There's a very strong film tradition in Russia, a storytelling with pictures ... where you tell a story much more with pictures than with words," Nikonorow said.

Hessman has seen firsthand how the characters, films and lessons of *Ulitsa*

*Sezam* have come to shape today's generation of Russian youth, while reflecting the country's modern values of creativity and self-expression. She recently completed a documentary film for which she interviewed several Russian adults about growing up behind the Iron Curtain and the contrasting experience of raising children in today's democratic society. Hessman's subjects included two schoolteachers, and she spent time in their classrooms, witnessing how their students learn and interact.

"From just having made a film where a lot takes place in school, I know the people in the film do get a sense that younger generations are more individualistic and are not afraid to be different. There were social ramifications if you were different in the past. Kids today have a lot more autonomy and self-confidence, and people in their 30s

have shared that perspective," Hessman said.

Designing the academic curriculums and melding all of the components needed to bring *Ulitsa Sezam* to life can prove challenging and tiresome, but Yana Shelygina, executive producer at DIXI-TV, Sesame Workshop's Russian co-producer, said the enthusiastic response she sees from children makes her work on the show worthwhile.

"The charge of positivity that you get within the work process, when afterwards you hear or see how children react to *Ulitsa Sezam* — that is really wonderful," she said in a press release.

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